

Towards Workplace Dignity

With the impending entry into force of the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No.188) of the International Labour Organization, it is now up to governments to take it forward

A long wait is over in the fisheries world, which warrants well for marine fishers, in particular. With Lithuania becoming the tenth Member of the International Labour Organization (ILO) to ratify the instrument (see article pg. 4) the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No.188) will now come into force in November 2017.

Even before entering into force, the provisions of the C188—together with better fishing regulations to tackle illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing—have been improving the labour standards applicable to fishers on fishing vessels in countries like Thailand, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, as evident from a recent Greenpeace report on human-rights abuses and illegal fishing in Thailand's overseas fishing industry (www.greenpeace.org/seasia/PageFiles/745330/Turn-The-Tide.pdf). Vessels of Thai origin under different flags, arguably, employ the largest number of migrant fishers in the world.

Gap analyses undertaken by several ILO Members in view of ratifying C188 have led to identifying specific shortfalls in relation to the effective implementation of its provisions, especially by fishing, maritime safety, and labour authorities, and the need to strengthen organizations representing fishers and fishing vessel owners at various levels through capacity building. Awareness-raising workshops in different parts of the world, organized by ILO and its tripartite constituents—government, employer and worker representatives—as well as by civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have helped fishers to comprehend and demand their rights at work, including social-security rights.

We would like C188 to provide protection not only to fishers on fishing vessels but also to those on rafts fishing far away from shore and facing precarious working conditions (see for example, the article on Myanmar, pg.20). It should also extend protection to those transhipped by carrier boats or reefers to fishing vessels and stationary rafts. The scope of commercial fishing should, at least, include these fishing-related activities. The Member States, while reporting to ILO on the implementation of C188,

may be encouraged to report on labour conditions on vessels/stationary raft used for fishing, as well as on labour conditions of fishers on carrier/reefer vessels.

A significant number of fishers, especially women, are in shore-based fishing, in addition to fishers who work in both shore- and vessel-based fishing operations. Since the shore-based fishers do not come within the purview of C188, we request ILO to prepare a decent work agenda, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), to guide national laws and practices for shore-based fishers and fishworkers, both in the formal and informal sector, highlighting all relevant ILO instruments that can protect their rights at work, including social-security rights.

We hope the news that C188 will soon enter into force encourages

more widespread ratification of this instrument, especially by Members who have already completed the gap analysis of their national situation against the requirements of C188. We hope both developed and developing Member States ratify the Convention, especially those States accounting for the largest share of fishers and fishworkers in the world, such as China, India, Indonesia and Vietnam, and countries like Thailand that employ a large number of migrant fishers in their distant-water fishing operations.

A comprehensive and inclusive approach to decent work of fishers and fishworkers in fishing and fishing-related activities can certainly ensure that not only fishers on board fishing vessels, but also all fishers and fishworkers in fishing and fishing-related activities “by virtue of their work, do not fall through the crack of social protection provided to other workers”, as pointed out by the ILO Law and Practice report of 2003, a precursor to the negotiations at the International Labour Conference that led to the adoption of C188.

By implementing C188, it will be possible to get rid of forced labour, eliminate unacceptable forms of child labour, and ensure regular payment of wages, better hours of work and rest, and occupational safety and health to all fishers and fishworkers. Ensuring dignity at workplace can certainly guarantee supply of a responsible workforce.

